



“We want people to see a little bit of our personality when they come in”

TOM MOODY AND ANDREW HELMSLEY

Ones to WATCH

Head chef, *Tom Moody*, and hotelier *Andrew Helmsley* have teamed up to put the Five Elms in Weedon firmly on the map

By **AMY BONIFAS**

It's been five years since head chef Tom Moody made it through to the semi-finals of *MasterChef: The Professionals*. Under the hot lights of the cameras, he channelled his Michelin-starred experience and surprised the judges with ambitious dishes and punchy flavours like veal and sweet bread with salted blackcurrant and roasted turbot tranche with seaweed.

Back then, Tom was at the Minster Mill Hotel in the Cotswolds, where he achieved three AA Rosettes. He worked alongside his friend and now co-owner, Andrew Helmsley, who has spent the last 20 years managing some of the country's finest hotels. It was here that they first thought about pouring their energy and passion into something all of their own.

“We'd always spoken about taking something on ourselves – as a joke!” laughs Andrew. “But, we'd been through Covid and we'd reached a point where we were happy to keep putting in the hard work, but

wanted to do something more on our terms. Then, we found this little gem that popped up round the corner from where I live.”

The ‘gem’ is a Grade II listed thatched country pub called the Five Elms in the heart of the Chilterns. Dating back to the late 18th century, its beautiful leafy frontage, quiet terrace and period fireplaces make it one of the most inviting spots in the area.

“I asked Tom what he thought. We were both tempted by the opportunity to spend more time with our families, so we weighed up the risk factors and it seemed like the perfect time to make the leap,” says Andrew.

The pair’s vision is simple and is all about making people feel welcome and relaxed as soon as they step through the door. “We wanted to create a local hub that could also represent the community on a broader scale,” says Tom. “Everyone wants to build a reputation for having good food, drinks and hospitality, but we also wanted to create somewhere where we’d genuinely want to go ourselves.” Their winning formula has been a hit with the community and is now bringing national recognition. Most recently, the Five Elms was selected as a new entry and number 80 in the top 100 Estrella Gastropubs 2023.

Chosen for its quintessential Chiltern charm and Tom’s intriguing menu focusing on local ingredients, the recognition is well-deserved. “It was a big surprise to be selected and felt like a reward for all the hard work we’ve put in,” says Andrew.

“When we started, our customers were local – and they’ve supported us fantastically well. But, you can’t expect locals to be eating with you five days a week! Now, more people are coming from further across Bucks and London, which is only a good thing.”



The draw that keeps people coming back, from near and far? “Consistency,” suggests Andrew. “We want people to see a little bit of our personality when they come in – we’re just ourselves, this double act, doing what we love.”

“We also stick to our guns,” adds Tom. “People often try to do too much of everything, and it can be distracting.” For him, the focus of being a head chef has also changed. “When I worked in hotels, I also found that I didn’t do as much cooking as I’d have liked,” he says. “It was more about keeping everything and everyone ticking over like a metronome. Now I get to concentrate on keeping ourselves and our customers happy.” And of course, the amazing dishes he consistently serves up. The menu is succinct and simple, but with plenty of surprises. It changes weekly, depending on what’s fresh and in season, so you can expect something new every time you visit.

“It’s all about big flavour, being as seasonal as possible and keeping things intriguing.”



says Tom. Though his style is multi-faceted, his food boils down to simple ingredients and ambitious techniques. “I like to play on comfort food and experiment with the things you might have enjoyed as a child growing up.”

And this has definitely hit the mark for me when I’ve been lucky enough to visit. I remember Tom’s bubbling jacket potato and crispy bacon soup. The dish transported me right back to my Grandma’s table, where she’d serve up my favourite cheesy jacket, with lashings of butter.

Other big-hitters on the menu have included delectable snacks like homemade crumpets with beef and onion butter; Tandoori veal sweetbreads and heavenly risottos stirred through with rich, local cheeses. “We’ll have venison on in November” says Tom. “And parsnips, pumpkin and squash – I like to use them in unexpected places like desserts, too.”

To drink, Andrew is in charge. Beers and ales are mainly local from Vale Brewery to Chiltern Brewery and the wine list is fresh and exciting. He’s all about helping customers try unique drinks that complement the big flavours of their food. “I want people to get amazing quality wines for their money, and keep up with changing tastes and curiosities,” he says.

Good things come from people having a good time together. “We really just want to keep loving what we do, and hope that customers keep wanting to hang out with us,” says Andrew. And with that sentiment, I can’t see them going far wrong. 🍷

fiveelmsweedon.com

